

CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Quah Cheng Sim

Faculty of Education
University of Malaya

The theoretical framework for this study is based on a model of five conflict management styles Rahim & Bonama (1979) and Rahim (1983). Rahim's Conflict-Management Styles Model comprises Integrating, Obliging, Dominating, Avoiding and Compromising. Rahim & Bonama (1979) differentiated the styles of handling conflict on two basic dimensions, concern for self and for others. The first dimension, concern for self, explains the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy his or her own concern. The second dimension, concern for others, explains the degree to which a person wants to satisfy the concern of others.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to determine teachers' and administrators' perceptions pertaining to the conflict of values, causes of conflict, levels of conflict, consequences of conflict and conflict management in secondary schools of Peninsular Malaysia. The study compared the styles of conflict management used by school administrators and teachers. The study also examined the significant factors contributing to the phenomenon of conflicts and styles of managing conflict that could contribute to constructive outcomes in secondary schools. In addition, the study also identified the problems school administrators encountered when managing conflicts. The objective of the study is to construct a conceptual model that could explain and represent a holistic view of conflict and the management of constructive conflict in Malaysian secondary schools.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered by the study are as follows:

1. What are the main factors that contributed to the occurrence of conflicts in secondary schools?
2. To what extent are the administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to conflict related to the styles of management in secondary schools?
3. What are the different styles of conflict management used by school administrators and teachers in secondary schools?
4. To what extent do the causes and styles of conflict contribute to constructive consequences in secondary schools?
5. To what extent does the intervention of the school administrators contribute to the constructive styles of conflict management?

Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach. The stratified-random sampling technique was employed to determine the samples representing the population of teachers and administrators in the study, involving 2,076 teachers and 138 administrators from 74 secondary schools in Peninsular Malaysia. The data collected were initially analyzed descriptively using frequency distributions, percentages, means and categorization through themes and concepts. The inferential techniques of the *t*-test, ANOVA, factor analysis, chi-square and logistic regression were also used to determine the extent and relationships of teachers' and administrators' perceptions on conflict and conflict management in schools.

Findings

The findings of the research indicated that the interdependent task domain was the most prominent domain contributing to the causes of conflict in secondary schools. The findings also indicated that the interdependent task domain and communication domain seemed to converge to form a meta-domain of the conflict phenomenon. In addition, the majority of the teachers and administrators in secondary schools were found to possess a positive perspective of the role of conflict. There were statistically significant relationships between the perspectives of conflict and the styles of conflict management. A significant difference was also revealed between conflict management styles employed by the teachers and administrators in the secondary schools in the study.

This study revealed that the consequences of conflicts experienced by teachers and administrators in secondary schools were constructive.

The findings also indicated that there was a significant difference pertaining to the consequence of conflict between urban and non-urban schools as well as the SMK and non-SMK schools.

The findings of this study indicated that the three approaches of conflict management that contributed to constructive consequences are shared-goals, compromising, and negotiation. During intervention, the school administrators encountered challenges pertaining to personal, task, communication and structural problems when managing conflict. Personal conflict which commonly occurred was reckoned to be the most difficult conflict to manage and the least beneficial compared to task conflict.

Discussion and Conclusion

In general, the findings implied that conflicts that occurred as well as the management of conflict in secondary schools were deemed as constructive. As a policy recommendation, the study suggested that conflict management programs should be implemented in all secondary schools in Malaysia.

References

- Baker, T. L. (1999). *Doing social research*. United States of America: McGraw-Hill.
- Brickman, P. (1974). *Social conflict: Readings in rule structures and conflict relationships*. Lexington, MA: Heath.
- Coser, R. A. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. New York: The Free Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1990). *Essentials of psychological testing* (5th ed.). New York: Harper.
- Deutsch, M. (1973). *The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Fisher, R. D. (1964). Fractionating conflict. In R. Fisher (Ed.), *International conflict and Behavioral Science* (pp. 91-109). New York: Basic Books.
- Hellriegel, D., & Slocum, J. W. (1979). *Organizational behavior*. New York: West.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1991). *Teaching students to be peacemakers*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book.
- Kerlinger, F. N. (1973). *Foundations of behavioral research* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Kilmann, R. H., & Thomas, K. W. (1977). Developing a force choice measure of conflict handling behavior: The 'MODE' Instrument. *Education and Psychological Measurement*, 37, 309-325.
- Pondy, L. R. (1967). Organizational conflicts: Concepts and models. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 12(2), 296-320.
- Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368-376.
- Rahim, M. A., & Bonama, T. V. (1979). Managing organizational conflicts. A model for diagnosis and intervention. *Psychological Reports*, 44, 1324-1344.

- Robbins, S. P. (1974). *Essentials of organizational behavior* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Thomas, K. W. (1976). Conflict and conflict management. In M. D. Dunnette (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial & organization psychology* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Wright, Q. (1951). The nature of conflict. *The Western Political Quarterly*, 4(2), 193-209.
- Zaidatol Akmaliah, L. P. (2001). *Pentadbiran pendidikan*. Shah Alam: Fajar Bakti.